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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Situation of the Oromo in Ethiopia

The Oromo people are one of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the Horn of Africa. Despite their numeric majority, the Oromo people are in a minority-like situation in the country. Their political, economic social and cultural life in Ethiopia has been marked by discrimination and marginalisation. This situation continues unabated in a more harsh and systematic way under the current government ruling in Ethiopia that controls the government apparatus, the army, security, political, economic and judicial systems to quell any dissents under the guise of economic development.

Since the government came to power in May 1991, the Oromo people were subjected to systematic human rights violations in a varied forms. Untold sufferings and systematic repressions in the last 25 years include extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, raping and torture. However, the Ethiopian government champions itself for being the fastest growing economy and key ally in the fight against terrorism to hide the crimes it committed against humanity.

The reality on the ground shows that the Oromo are targeted solely on the basis of their ethnicity. As a result, a high number of prison cells in Ethiopia are filled by the Oromos and the main language spoken there is Afan Oromo. At least 300 Oromo peaceful protesters were killed and hundreds were injured from live bullets in the last two years alone. Thousands of Oromo students, teachers, journalists, artists, businessmen, opposition party leaders and members are currently languishing in prisons. Land grabbing negatively affects the livelihood. The forcible eviction of many farmers from small subsistence farming, pastoral and grazing areas has led to extreme poverty.

Forced evictions of the farmers in the name of investment were massively carried out in the surroundings of the cities in Oromia state and Addis Ababa in the past ten years without their consent and compensation. Millions of hectares of arable land was confiscated mainly by agribusinesses from foreign multinational companies and the government cadres and their operatives resulted in the uprooting and destitution of the millions that led in part to further the starvation of the ten millions of peoples in Ethiopia.

Cut flower plantations that expanded within the radius of 80km surrounding Addis Ababa in less than a decade were feeding millions before they changed hand. The establishment of these plantations and the expansion of real estate were the stepping stone to establish the boundary for a special Zone of Oromia which later was to be incorporated in the Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan or shortly "Master Plan" in 2014. Similarly, Midroc's and Karturi's farms meant for the crop export into their countries of origin; jatropha, castor oil and sugar cane plantations were not established on non-arable *terra nullis* land, but on small subsistence farms whose owners were forcibly evicted without (with small) compensation and security to their livelihood deprived. The Oromo people are deprived of their livelihood and personhood by successive Ethiopian successive governments. As a result of the suffering from oppression, exploitation and persecution, the students staged a peaceful protest for years and the government reaction was heavy-handed.

In early April 2014, the Ethiopian state disclosed a new master plan to swallow the towns and rural areas around Addis Ababa at the expense of forced evictions of estimated 2 million of Oromo farmers from their ancestral lands. It was aimed to expand Addis Ababa by around 2000% from the current 54,000 ha to 1.1 million ha.

The decision was unanimously opposed by Oromo political parties and civic organisations as well as Oromos from all walks of life for several reasons. The plan was unconstitutional, not inclusive and without the consent of the people. Moreover, it was deliberated to destroy the identity, livelihood, culture and language of the Oromo people.

Oppression of Unarmed Oromo Protesters

In May 2014, the Oromo students from different universities, secondary schools and the general public from all over Oromia engaged the Ethiopian government in a peaceful protest to voice their legitimate concerns. Students from different universities and high schools demonstrated in tens of thousands and denounced the plan.

The demonstration that started at Ambo, 100km from the capital, more than 50 civilians were killed by the government security forces that reacted with violent shear force and sniper bullets. In total over 80 unarmed civilians were killed. Several hundreds of unarmed civilians were injured and thousands were arrested. The Ethiopian government shelved the implementation for a while until it issued final version of its master plan in the last quarter of 2015.

On November 12, 2015, students broke protest at the town of Ginchi, 80km from the capital to the West of Addis Ababa, which engulfed all parts of the Oromia state within two weeks.

The Ethiopian Government issued a decree for Oromia to be ruled under martial law from the end of December 2015. Over 50,000 regulars and special army were deployed under the command post led by the Prime Minister, Head of Army, Police and Security Chief to curb the protest which they labelled as the acts of "witches" and "satanic".

In the last three months of ongoing protests, more than 220 civilians were killed by live bullets from the government security forces. Several thousands were injured from live bullets and over 10,000 students, farmers, teachers, civil servants, singers, journalists, leaders and members of the Oromo opposition party were the targets of killings, torture, severe beatings, rape and mass arrest. Children from age one to old men of the age of 80, pregnant women and mothers, a groom and a mother with her two sons are among those killed.

Recommendations

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the government of Ethiopia:

- To allow the Oromo people to exercise their fundamental freedom and rights enshrined in the UN International Covenants of Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICCPR and ICESCR), the constitution of Ethiopia and African Commission for Human and People's Rights. They want to be free from marginalization, discrimination and dispossession of their land; they want to protect their political, economic social and cultural rights and exercise their right to self-determination.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council:

- To send its special rapporteurs to Oromia state in Ethiopia to investigate the human rights violations on the ground.
- To call on the Ethiopian government to adhere to international instruments, unconditionally release all peaceful protesters and political prisoners; to stop killing and injuring innocent civilians; to bring the perpetrators to justice and to stop non-inclusive development projects affecting the livelihood of the population.